

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 CEA-02 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11

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TRSE-00 LAB-06 SIL-01 OMB-01 PM-07 MC-02 ACDA-19 SS-20

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9414

SECDEF WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

USDELMC

USCINCEUR ECJ7 VAIHINGEN GERMANY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRUSSELS 7280

SECSTATE ALSO FORMCOMMERCE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, BEXP, BE

SUBJECT: REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT FOR BELGIAN F-104G'S

1. SUMMARY, RUMORS ARE CIRCULATING IN THE PRESS AND BELGIAN INDUSTRIAL CIRCLES TO THE EFFECT THAT THE MIRAGE F-1 WILL BE CHOSEN TO REPLACE BELGIUM'S F-104G'S. TECHNICAL FACTORS WILL PLAY A ROLE IN BELGIAN DECISION, BUT ONCE BELGIANS ARE SATISFIED THAT ALL COMPETITORS MEET MINIMUM TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS,

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ECONOMIC COMPENSATION WILL BE THE MAJOR DETERMINANT. OFFICIALS DENY THAT ANY DECISION YET MADE BUT ARE IMPRESSED WITH DASSAULT'S

OFFSET OFFERS. SOME OFFICIALS, HOWEVER, ARE BEGINNING TO CONSIDER F-104G REPLACEMENT IN CONTEXT OF JACKSON-NUNN REQUIREMENT. COMMON PROCUREMENT BY ALL ALLIES INTENDING TO REPLACE F-104G'S COULD WORK IN OUR FAVOR. EMBASSY REQUESTS STATE-OF-PLAY REPORTS FROM OTHER CAPITALS AND WASHINGTON REACTION TO PROPOSAL FOR A U.S. GUARANTEE OF LOGISTICAL FOLLOW-ON SUPPORT FOR ANY AMERICAN COMPETITOR THAT WINS THE CONTRACT. END SUMMARY.

2. ELEMENTS OF BELGIAN INDUSTRIAL AND OFFICIAL SECTORS ARE STRONGLY IMPLYING THROUGH PRESS AND PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS THAT A BELGIAN DECISION TO PURCHASE THE MIRAGE IS AS GOOD AS FINAL. ONE STEADY SOURCE FOR THIS "INFORMATION" HAS A VESTED INTEREST IN SUCH A DECISION: SABCA, IN WHICH DASSAULT HAS A FIFTY PERCENT INTEREST, STANDS TO PARTICIPATE HEAVILY IN MIRAGE F-1 PRODUCTION. BUT OTHER BELGIAN FIRMS (WITH NO DASSAULT CONNECTION) THAT HOPE TO PROFIT FROM THE F-104G REPLACEMENT CONTRACT ALSO SUSPECT THAT THE FRENCH PLANE HAS AN UNBEATABLE LEAD. ALSO, AN ARTICLE IN LE SOIR OF DECEMBER 11 BY AN APPARENTLY WELL-BRIEFED REPORTER NOTES THAT IT IS NO SECRET THAT THE MIRAGE F-1 HOLDS MANY "TRUMP CARDS", NO MATTER WHAT THE PREFERENCES OF THE BELGIAN AIR FORCE. THE ARTICLE ALSO CITES A BELGIAN CORRESPONDENT FOR "AVIATION MAGAZINE" AS REPORTING THAT THE GOB HAS PROBABLY DECIDED IN PRINCIPLE IN FAVOR OF THE MIRAGE.

3. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE (BRUSSELS 7030), MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS RECENTLY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE CHOICE OF AN AIRCRAFT WOULD BE BASED ON BOTH TECHNICAL AND ECONOMIC GROUNDS. AN OFFICIAL OF THE ECONOMICS MINISTRY WHO IS IN A POSITION TO KNOW (BOLAND) REPORTEDLY HAS TOLD A U.S. INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVE THAT THE DECISION WILL TURN SOLELY ON THE ISSUE OF ECONOMIC COMPENSATION FOR BELGIUM, NOTWITHSTANDING DIFFERENCES IN TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES OR PURCHASE PRICE.

4. IN AN EFFORT TO OBTAIN FURTHER CLARIFICATION, EMBOFF DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH VANDEN BOEYNANTS' ASSISTANT CHIEF OF CABINET (LT.COL. LEFEBVRE) ON DECEMBER 5. LEFEBVRE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT ECONOMIC MINISTRY OFFICIALS MIGHT WELL STRESS THE COMPENSATION FACTOR, EVEN TO THE EXCLUSION OF THE TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS, JUST AS THE BELGIAN AIR STAFF COULD BE EXPECTED TO RECOMMEND THE PLANE WITH THE MOST ADVANCED PERFORMANCE
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CHARACTERISTICS, REGARDLESS OF COST OR COMPENSATION POTENTIAL. NEITHER VIEW, HE SAID, WOULD PREVAIL ABSOLUTELY. BY WAY OF EXPLAINING VANDEN BOEYNANTS' REMARKS TO THE AMBASSADOR, LEFEBVRE SAID THAT ONCE THE CONTENDING AIRCRAFT HAD BEEN JUDGED SATISFACTORY FROM THE TECHNICAL POINT OF VIEW, BELGIUM WOULD GIVE GREATER WEIGHT TO OTHER FACTORS RATHER THAN DWELL UPON MARGINAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PLANES THAT ALL MET MINIMUM PERFORMANCE CRITERIA.

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE OTHER FACTORS, HE MADE CLEAR, WAS THE PROMISE OF A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF ONGOING BELGIAN

INDUSTRIAL PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE VENTURE. IN SHORET, CONCLUDED LEFEBVRE, BELGIUM COULD WELL END UP SELECTING AN AIR-CARFT SOMEWHAT TECHNICALLY INFERIOR AND MEASURABLY MORE EXPENSIVE THAN THE COMPETITORS, IF IT OFFERED BETTER PROSPECTS FOR DOMESTIC EMPLOYMENT AND PRODUCTION INTO THE FUTURE.

5. ECOMCOUNS LATER CALLED ON SPITAEELS, CHIEF OF CABINET FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS TO PRIME MINISTER, TO EXPRESS CONCERN OVER RUMORS THAT F-1 ALREADY CHOSEN IN PRINCIPLE. HE REFERRED TO THE AMBASSADOR'S CONVERSATION WITH VANDEN BOEYANTS AND EMPHASIZED THAT, IF THESE RUMORS WERE TRUE, THE EFFORT AND EXPENSE OF U.S. FIRMS HAVE BEEN USELESS. HE ALSO STRESSED THAT SUCH A DECISION AT A TIME WHEN THE BURDENSOME ISSUE REMAINS UNRESOLVED SEEMED MOST INOPPORTUNE. SPITAEELS WAS, INCIDENTALLY, EVIDENTLY SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT FRENCH HAD NO PLANS TO BUY F-1 FOR THEIR OWN FORCES.

6. SPITAEELS TOLD US HE HAD SEEN THE LE SOIR ARTICLE BUT HAD NOT YET GIVEN IT MUCH ATTENTION. HE GAVE ASSURANCES THAT RUMORS AS TO DECISION IN FAVOR OF FRENCH WERE ENTIRELY WITHOUT FOUNDATION. MATTER HAD NOT YET EVEN BEEN BROUGHT TO ATTENTION OF MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COORDINATION (CMCES). IN FACT, NO INFORMATION ON PLANE CHOICE HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO COMMITTEE IN ANY FORM. THERE IS ONLY ONE MORE MEETING OF COMMITTEE BEFORE END OF YEAR AND HE, THEREFORE, SAW NO POSSIBILITY OF INTER-MINISTERIAL CONSIDERATION THIS YEAR. SPITAEEL'S COMMENT WAS CONFIRMED LATER BY A REPORT BY SINGER REPRESENTATIVES (HERE TO PRESENT AN ECONOMIC COMPENSATION PROGRAM FOR THEIR PORTION OF COBRA AVIONICS IN SUPPORT OF NORTHROP OVERALL PRESENTATION). BOLAND OF ECONOMICS MINISTRY TOLD SINGER THAT HIS MINISTRY HAD REPLIED NEGATIVELY TO MOD REQUEST FOR EVALUATION OF F-104
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REPLACEMENT OPTIONS BY DECEMBER 5 ON GROUNDS THAT MORE TIME WAS REQUIRED.

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USCINCEUR ECJ7 VAIHINGEN GERMANY

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7. SPITAELS WENT ON TO SAY THAT DASSAULT HAD, OF COURSE, PUT ON A LOT OF PRESSURE FOR PACKAGE DEAL INCLUDING F-1 IN LATE SUMMER WHEN ALPHA-JET WAS CHOSEN, AND THERE WAS SOME SUPPORT FOR THIS APPROACH IN THE CHARLEROI AREA (WHERE BEIGIAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY IS CONCENTRATED). SPITAELS WAS CATEGORICAL, HOWEVER, IN SAYING THAT BELGIANS HAD MADE ABSOLUTELY NO COMMITMENT ON F-1'S TO FRENCH. HE CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT DECISION OF THIS MAGNITUDE WOULD NOT BE TAKEN WITHOUT CAREFUL CONSIDERATION IN THE GOVERNMENT, AND WOULD TAKE TIME.

8. ECOMCOUNS THANKED SPITAELS FOR HIS ASSURANCES AND ASKED HIM
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TO CALL ON EMBASSY AT ANY TIME IF THERE WERE ANY PROBLEMS WITH AMERICAN OFFERES WHERE WE MIGHT CONCEIVEABLY BE HELPFUL. SPITAELS SUGGESTED WE GET IN TOUCH WITH HIM IN JANUARY TO CHECK AGAIN ON DEVELOPMENTS.

9. WE SUBSEQUENTLY MET ON DECEMBER 12 WITH HEBETTE, CHIEF OF CABINET TO VANDEN BOEYANTS IN HIS ROLE AS PRESIDENT OF CMCES. WE AGAIN ASKED HEBETTE ABOUT RUMORS IN PRESS THAT DECISION OF F-104G FOLLOW-UP AIRCRAFT WILL BE TAKEN BY DECEMBER 18 AND THAT IT WILL BE IN FAVOR OF DASSAULT. HEBETTE FIRMLY DENIED THAT DECISION

WILL BE MADE THAT SOON BUT SAID IT WILL BE TAKEN IN NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS A "CERTAIN PREJUDICE" IN FAVOR OF DASSAULT IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY (AS OPPOSED TO THE AIR FORCE, WHICH WILL MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON TECHNICAL APPRAISAL) OWING TO DASSAULT'S MOST ATTRACTIVE OFFSET OFFER. HEBETTE PROMISED TO CHECK WITH DEFENSE MINISTRY AND LET US KNOW WHETHER THERE WERE ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

10. WE POINTED OUT TO HEBETTE THAT, WHILE WE WERE AWARE THAT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES EXIST FROM FRANCE, U.S. ALSO HAS A KEEN INTEREST IN PROMOTING INTERESTS OF U.S. SUPPLIERS. WE CITED IMPLICATIONS OF JACKSON-NUNN AMENDMENT FOR INCREASED MILITARY PURCHASES IN U.S. IF U.S. TROOP LEVELS ARE TO BE MAINTAINED, AND NOTED THAT ALLIED AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENTS ARE PROBABLY LARGEST SINGLE EUROPEAN MILITARY PURCHASE COMING UP IN NEXT FEW YEARS.

11. AS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, BELGIAN FINANCE MINISTER DE CLERCQ IS INTERESTED IN BURDENSOME IMPLICATIONS OF F-104G REPLACEMENT DECISION. ACCORDING TO DE CLERCQ'S CHIEF OF CABINET, MINISTER HAS ALREADY STATED IN CABINET DISCUSSIONS THAT GOB SHOULD PURCHASE U.S. AIRCRAFT IN ORDER TO MEET NEW BURDENSOME REQUIREMENTS. CHIEF OF CABINET CONFIRMED THAT INNER CABINET WILL MEET ONCE MORE THIS MONTH TO DISCUSS REPLACEMENT QUESTION.

12. LOCKHEED REPRESENTATIVES HAVE TOLD US THAT DUTCH AND BELGIANS HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF JOINT PURCHASE OF REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT. AIR FORCE OFFICIALS OF BOTH COUNTRIES LAST MET TO DISCUSS THIS QUESTION IN SEPTEMBER AND AGREED TO MEET AGAIN WHEN NETHERLANDS LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT HAS APPROVED 1974 DEFENSE CONFIDENTIAL

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BUDGET. LOCKHEED AND NORTHROP REPS SAID THAT MEETING BETWEEN DUTCH AND BELGIANS LIKELY TO TAKE PLACE NEXT WEEK, PROBABLY DEC 17.

13. COMMENT: WE CAN DRAW CERTAIN CONCLUSIONS AT THIS POINT THAT MAY HELP POINT THE WAY TO HOW THE U.S. CAN BEST SUPPORT AMERICAN ENTRIES OVER THE COMING WEEKS. (A) WHILE THE STORY IS ABOUT A DECISION HAVING BEEN TAKEN FOR THE MIRAGE F-1 MAY WELL LEAD BACK TO DASSAULT OR FRENCH GOVERNMENT SOURCES, THERE DOES SEEM TO BE A TENDENCY IN SOME GOV QUARTERS TO LEAN TOWARD THE FRENCH PLANE. (B) UNLESS IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT THE F-1 IS INCAPABLE OF FULFILLING THE TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS, ITS RELATIVE INFERIORITY WILL NOT SERIOUSLY HAMPER ITS CHANCES. (C) THE PROSPECTS FOR INCREASED EMPLOYMENT IN DEPRESSED AREAS WILL BE A KEY FACTOR IN THE DECISION, WHICH IS TO BE TAKEN BY MINISTERS WHO ARE ABOVE ALL POLITICIANS AND, CERTAINLY IN THE CASE OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS, BUSINESSMEN. (D) SOME OF OUR CONTACTS ARE RESPONSIVE TO THE

ARGUMENT THAT THE PURCHASE OF AN AMERICAN PLANE WOULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARD SOLVING THE PROBLEM RAISED BY THE JACKSON-NUNN AMENDMENT, AND WE INTEND TO PURSUE THIS LINE IN THE FUTURE. (E) THE FRENCH WOULD LIKE TO SEE A QUICK DECISION NOW THAT BIAS IN FAVOR OF THE MIRAGE IS SEEMINGLY RUNNING HIGH. TIME IS PROBABLY ON THE U.S. SIDE, SINCE IT MIGHT REVEAL WEAKNESSES ABOUT THE F-1 NOT YET KNOWN HERE, AND BECAUSE IT WILL GIVE US A GREATER OPPORTUNITY TO LOBBY FOR U.S. ENTRIES AGAINST THE F-1 (AND THE FRENCH-BRITISH JAGUAR, MENTIONED IN THE PRESS OF LATE).

14. IF WE ARE CORRECT IN ASSUMING FROM THIS DISTANCE THAT THE DUTCH ARE UNLIKELY TO BUY FRENCH UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, THEN THE SUPPORT GIVEN TO BUY FRENCH UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, THEN THE SUPPORT GIVEN TO THE IDEA OF COMMON PROCUREMENT FOR THE F-104G REPLACEMENT AT THE DECEMBER DPC/MINISTERIAL MEETING (BY THE U.S., BELGIAN AND DUTCH DEFENSE MINISTERS AND SYG LUNS) WOULD WORK IN OUR FAVOR. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO US TO HAVE CURRENT EMBASSY ASSESSMENTS OF HOST GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE F-104G REPLACEMENT FROM THE HAGUE, COPENHAGEN, OSLO AND ROME. WE ALSO THINK IT WOULD BE WORTH INQUIRING INTO THE IMPLICATIONS OF DUTCH MINISTER VREDELING'S STATEMENT (USNATO 5992) THAT "IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FINANCIALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE NETHERLANDS TO ACQUIRE A HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED AIRCRAFT WHICH WOULD BE NEEDED TO FULFILL ALL THE TASKS FOR WHICH

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THE STARFIGHTER WAS DESIGNED."

DOES THIS MAKE ONE OR MORE OF THE COMPETITORS FOR THE F-104G REPLACEMENT LESS VIABLE THAN THE OTHERS?

15. THERE IS ONE STEP THAT WE BELIEVE WOULD BE MOST HELPFUL TO OUR EFFORT TO INFLUENCE THE BELGIANS (AND OTHERS) TO SELECT AN AMERICAN PLANE. BELGIAN AIR FORCE OFFICERS HAVE OFTEN REMARKED UPON THE CRITICAL SPARE PARTS PROBLEM THEY ARE NOW FACING WITH THEIR MIRAGE F-5'S AS A RESULT OF FRENCH INABILITY OR UNWILLINGNESS TO KEEP UP WITH THE DEMAND. THEY KNOW THAT FRANCE DOES NOT INTEND TO BUY THE F-1 FOR ITS OWN AIR FORCE, BUT THEY ALSO ARE AWARE THAT THE U.S. MAY NOT BUY ANY OF THE AMERICAN COMPETING AIRCRAFT. A U.S. GOVERNMENT GUARANTEE, ISSUED NOT RPT NOW, OF CONTINUED LOGISTICAL SUPPORT TO ANY AMERICAN AIRCRAFT SELECTED WOULD, WE THINK, BE CRUCIAL AND WOULD FURNISH A STARK CONTRAST TO BELGIAN EXPERIENCE WITH DASSAULT'S PERFORMANCE TO DATE.

16. A SECOND POSSIBILITY IS USG GUARANTEED OFFSET PROVIDED BY THIRD COUNTRY (SEE MAAG BELLUX (C) MSG 071710Z NOV). IF FOUND FEASIBLE IT SHOULD BE PUBLICIZED AS AN ONGOING POSSIBILITY OF WHAT BELGIAN APPETITES FOR AN ANSWER TO THEIR PROBLEM IN OFFSET AREA. THIS THIRD COUNTRY APPROACH HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF ALLOWING

PURCHASES BY THIRD COUNTRIES, E.G. FRG, IN BELGIUM TO BE
CREDITED TO U.S. COMPANIES' OFFSET OBLIGATIONS IN BELGIUM.

17. A THIRD POSSIBILITY WOULD BE FOR U.S.G. TO BE FLEXIBLE
REGARDING DEVELOPMENT SHARING CHARGES PASSED ON TO NATO COUNTRIES
WHO WISH TO PURCHASE F-104 REPLACEMENT FIGHTERS. THE DIRECT
AND INDIRECT BENEFITS TO U.S. MAY WELL BE GREATER THAN A RIGID
POLICY OF FIXED DEVELOPMENT CHARGES. THE AMOUNT PER AIRCRAFT IN
THE NORTHROP P-530 COBRA AND THE LOCKHEED LANCER APPROXIMATES
\$80,000 PER AIRCRAFT. THE AMOUNT IS SLIGHT IF THE GOOD WILL IT
DEVELOPS CAN INFLUENCE THE PURCHASE. DEVELOPMENT CHARGES HAVE BEEN
WAIVED ON A RECIPROCAL BASIS ON OTHER PROJECTS, NOTABLY IN PROVISIONS
OF THE F-104G CONSORTIUM. END COMMENT. STRAUSS-HUPE

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